

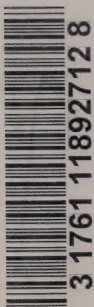


kakabeka falls

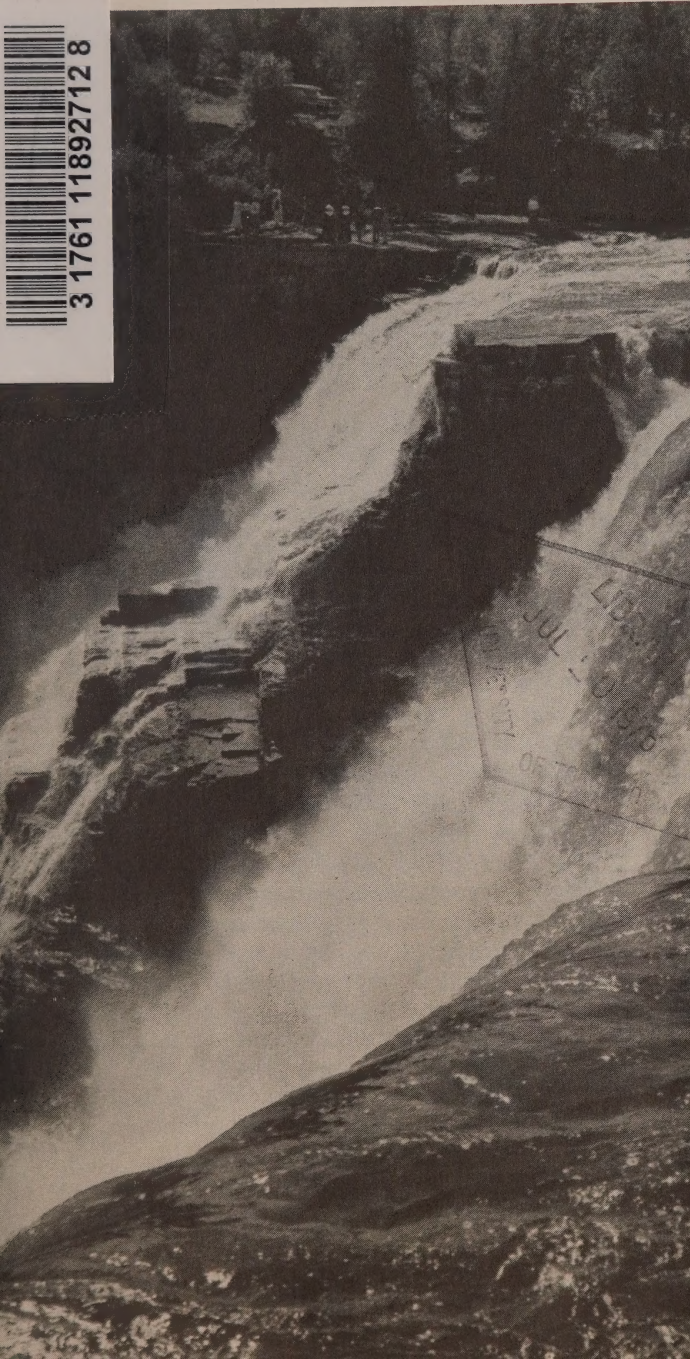
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beauty and power

Legend and the fascination of tumbling water combine to make Kakabeka Falls one of Northwestern Ontario's major tourist attractions. Situated on the Kaministiquia River in Kakabeka Provincial Park, 20 miles west of Thunder Bay, the spectacular falls attract visitors by the thousands each year. They come to see the river where it plunges over a sheer bluff 120 feet high. Kaministiquia is an Indian word meaning "The river that winds" while Kakabeka, appropriately enough, means "high cliff".

A French Canadian named Jacques de Noyon was the first white man to enjoy the spectacle - in 1688. In the years that followed, the river, with a mile-long portage around the falls, became an important route for fur traders between Fort William and the Canadian West.

Aside from their scenic appeal, the falls represented a rich source of electric power and the drop in the river at this point was utilized early in the electrical history of the province. Undertaken by private interests to meet the electric needs of industries establishing at Fort William after the turn of the century, construction of the Kakabeka generating station, placed in service in 1906, represented a formidable engineering project. It involved the building of a siding and temporary station at a point on the Canadian Northern Railway a half mile from the falls, and construction of a narrow gauge railway to move equipment to the site.

Except for the reduced flow over the falls, the project was completed at little cost to the natural beauty of the site. Water is diverted from the river upstream from the falls and is conveyed by an open cut canal, concrete conduits and four penstocks to the powerhouse located at a turn in the river below the falls. Two of the four units were completed in 1906 and the others added in 1911 and 1914 - giving the plant a total capacity of 24,200 kilowatts.

Ontario Hydro's association with Kakabeka Falls dates back to 1910 when it built a four-mile



transmission line to service the City of Port Arthur with power purchased from the plant's builders and original owners - the Kaministiquia Power Company. Port Arthur thus became one of the earliest municipalities in the province to receive power from Ontario Hydro. It wasn't until 1949 that Hydro acquired the generating station.

Dedicated to the belief that beauty and power production can co-exist, Ontario Hydro entered into an agreement with the Ontario Government in 1962 guaranteeing much higher minimum flows over the falls during the tourist season. Under the agreement, Hydro undertakes to maintain fixed minimum flows over the falls during daylight hours from June to the end of September of 300 cubic feet per second (cfs) on weekends and holidays, and 150 cfs on weekdays.

Beauty has priority over power generation. If the river flow is not sufficient to maintain full power production while meeting the terms of the agreement, generation is reduced accordingly.

An agreement with the original owners relating to the flow of water over the falls called for a minimum of only 67 cfs at all times.

Among the oldest of Hydro's 69 hydraulic generating plants across the province, Kakabeka remains an important and reliable source of power - but time and the river have had their effects. The original main dam, a 300-foot-long concrete structure, was replaced in 1968. The conduits were rebuilt in 1970 and the pattern of the flow over the falls has changed.

Where 30 years ago the waters of the Kaministiquia cascaded evenly across the full width of the falls, the water now pours largely over one side - the right side, looking upstream. Natural erosion is changing the rock formation and thus the path the waters take.

One feature long associated with the ridge of the falls has not changed, however, and that is the rocky promontory jutting out and upward from the centre. Some profess to see the figure of a reclining maiden reflected in the water vapors swirling above.

She is Greenmantle, a courageous Indian girl who, according to legend, lured the enemies of her people to their deaths over the falls.